Damian de Vega September 28, 2010

**Disability in Zero Gravity**

"Many people have asked me why I am taking this flight. I am doing it for many reasons. First of all, I believe that life on Earth is at an ever-increasing risk of being wiped out by a disaster such as sudden global warming, nuclear war, a genetically engineered virus, or other dangers. I think the human race has no future if it doesn't go into space. I therefore want to encourage public interest in space."

-Stephen Hawking

Very few people in the world have been to the great outer space. How many people do you know have taken a trip outside of the Earth’s atmosphere without being an astronaut? It wouldn’t be to bold to say that you didn’t personally know any individual that can say they have done so. However, there is one man that has taken this trip and enjoyed every moment of it because it had been his dream for decades and decades to go. Describing the man that earned an amazing, almost impossible, adventure to go on, it would never cross your mind to think that this man was a member of the disabled community. Yes, it is true. This man of great achievements far beyond his trip to space goes by the name of Stephen Hawking. He is known for having one of the most precise and brilliant brains in the world to this day. Hawking is an extraordinarily sharp physicist who is looked upon as some sort of ‘God’ in the world of physics. Stephen Hawking sits next to the greats, in the same category, alongside Newton, Gauss and even Einstein. His overly abled-nature means that we have to re-think what is defined as ‘abled’ or ‘disabled.’



Hayes, Brian J. “Professor Stephen Hawking zero-gravity flight Images/Pictures.” 26 April 2007: 1. Web. 29 Sep 2010. http://www.age-of thesage.org/scientist/stephen\_hawkingzerogravity.html

This image above is setting an example and promoting an idea that the human race needs to expand its borders outside of Earth. Steven Hawking did not only go into space for his own self interests but to inspire others to think positively about going into space. In Simi Linton’s “Reassigning Meaning,” she discusses that the disabled community feels that they achieve for themselves and for the good of others as well. Linton says, "we shouldn't be impelled to do these because we have a disability, to prove to some social overseer that we can perform, but we should pursue them because they deliver their own rewards and satisfactions" (Linton 229). This relates back to Stephen Hawking’s trip to zero gravity because of the fact that he went to space because it was something he wanted to do, his ‘satisfaction’ but he also felt the ‘reward’ by sending an important message to the human race. Before his journey into space, Hawking described how much he had been looking forward to going into space. Hawking expresses, "I have been wheelchair-bound for almost four decades and the chance to float free in zero g will be wonderful" (Hayes 1). It truly must have been an amazing feeling for him to float free. I personally am jealous that he got to go to space and I didn’t because I cannot afford the trip, although Hawking’s trip was a gift from Zero Gravity Corp. The point I am making is that the image of this disabled man in outer space has a much greater meaning to it than just a disabled man in zero gravity. His purpose for being where he is does not have to do with disability, but for an eye-opener to help humanity. The term ‘disabled’ should not apply to this image. We need to see beyond the physical means of this picture and realize what it’s true meaning is.

Nevertheless, Stephen Hawking was the first person with a disability to experience weightlessness on a zero gravity flight. This is a groundbreaking achievement for the disabled community. It is an inspiring notion that a man with a paralyzing disease ALS (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis), also known as Lou Gehrig's disease, could make it so far in life. After being told he would pass away when he was about twenty-five, he never gave up and is now 65 years old. He never let his disease stop him. This is a man many people around the world admire to the fullest. The main question is should the word ‘disabled’ define this man?

In “Reassigning Meaning,” Linton also argues "centering the disabled position and labeling its opposite nondisabled focuses attention on both the structure of knowledge and the structure of society" (Linton 226). This explains that the terminology used on this group of people is purely a black and white topic. There should be a gray area for acceptance where people like Stephen Hawking would fit perfectly. Linton goes on to say, "those who are not deemed normal are devalued and considered a burden or problem" (Linton 230). This does not include Stephen Hawking in any way. In fact, he is the opposite of a ‘burden’ or a ‘problem.’ Without Hawking, our science would be set back and we would not be as progressive of a race as we are today. Our understanding of black holes would be outdated, along with our knowledge of some recent Theoretical Physics laws. The word ‘disabled’ surpasses any thoughts I have of Stephen Hawking. When his name is mentioned, I think about black holes and science and his teachings more than the fact that he is paralyzed and talks through a machine. This is why Linton’s article is sensible in how she reassures that we need to see people for who they are and nothing else.

Take the time to get to know anybody you can whether they are black, white, handicapped, green, blue; it really doesn’t matter. We need a better understanding in that we are all the same. We are a part of the human race and maybe we should focus more on going into space before we, as human beings, become extinct. We should work as a team rather than treating one another poorly or unfairly. The image, alone, teaches a lesson to both the abled and disabled. It may sound cliché but the lecture is we all can achieve anything we want if we desire it enough. A disabled person could be better than an abled person at certain things and vice versa. I think this image technically proves that point very vividly. Sometimes in life, there are no barriers that can stop you from being who you are meant to be.

**Works Cited**

Linton, Simi. “Reassigning Meaning.” Disabilities Studies Reader. 3.

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